

Dennis DeLee, O.D.

I am writing you as an interested Optometrist here in Chicago. Access to our patients is what keeps my practice going and our patient's seeing. I have been practicing in Chicago for 38 years and my patients come to me through their stand alone vision plans, in particular and through their health plans when they have an eye health issue like a red, painful eye. I am past president of my local Optometric Society which is part of the Illinois Optometric Association and State Professional Representative for Vision Service Plan. I have my own practice in downtown Chicago and as a small business owner require access to my patients to continue if I am to stay in business and keep my employees. Many, many of our patients come from some of the stand-alone Vision Care plans. I know that my fellow Optometrists here in the State of Illinois have access to their patients in this same manner. I would like to put my 2 cents in about our patient's needs for comprehensive vision care on an annual basis, especially children through the essential health benefits. Both vision with seeing clearly, and eye health which can uncover many systemic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes and brain tumor are important for the overall health of the citizens of the State of Illinois. Many patients come to see us Optometrists before ever seeing their Medical Doctor as they need to get their glasses to see. This allows us the opportunity to screen for many of the important health problems like hypertension and diabetes and get them to their doctor to treat their health problems after we have allowed them to see. Wednesday, I hope you will consider placing comprehensive vision care in the Essential Health Benefits and allowing stand alone vision insurance plans to directly participate in our Illinois State exchange so that our patients can continue to see their doctors and care for their vision and eye health on a regular basis. Without the ability for my patients to purchase their stand-alone vision insurance through the state exchange could jeopardize my patients eye health and vision and my small business along with my almost 2,000 colleagues throughout the state. Thank you for your consideration. Yours truly, Dennis DeLee, O.D.

CANDACE TRUTY

And now your not going to bother paying for ambulance transports? As usual, Illinois takes the expensive bleeding heart route which comes out of the pockets of those of us who must already cover our own policy expenses. Doesn't anyone get the idea yet? This state is the second worst in the nation surpassed only by California. It's embarrassing to admit I live in such a dysfunctional state. Change your philosophy. You would be well advised to wait until the November elections are over before you decide to implement anything. Stop wasting my money. You haven't even bothered to place any coverage in your policies for ambulance transports. The usual poor planning on the part of this state. I operate an

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ambulance transport company and am sick to death of not being paid by the state. It is unlikely that I will even accept reimbursement for any of this Obamacare garbage anyway. I'm all for going after payment from the consumer since this state cannot or will not meet their obligations. If Obama loses, which I pray for on a daily basis, this whole mess will turn out to be nothing more than another stupid State of Illinois waste of taxpayer money. Sit on this until after November. Show just a tiny flash of intelligence for a change.

Derek Ball

I am commenting in favor of the Health Benefits Exchange and asking that, in forming the Mental Health Benefits, ALL Mental Health professions be represented. Specifically, LMFTs, who provide a distinct and unique service to people in Illinois in that they are the only licensed mental health providers who are REQUIRED to have experience and training in working with couples and families together, MUST be included. LMFTs are trained to treat issues such as depression and anxiety. Research on outcome and recidivism show that LMFTs work effectively (symptom reduction) and efficiently (fewer sessions and less likely to return to treatment). Consumers in Illinois need to be given effective and efficient options and state mandates on mental health coverage have reflected this by including LMFTs. Any benchmark plan should reflect these laws. LMFTs have been licensed in IL for almost 20 years, are covered by BCBS and, in recent years have attained vendorship in the State of Illinois. HCRIC will be benefitting consumers and healthcare recipients in Illinois by not letting insurance companies retroactively rescind these vital consumer healthcare mandates during this benchmark process without legislative approval. LMFTs need to be included as mental health providers in this plan.

Kevin Fadden

I viewed the insurance list of providers and benefits they will cover and noted that "medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation" is not included in the coverage statements.

Mary Ann Miller, RN, EMT-P, TNS, CMTE

As a member of the IDPH EMS Advisory Council, I read with interest the development of an Illinois Insurance Exchange. Being involved in EMS in Illinois since 1974, I have seen the growth of Emergency Medical Services and in recent years the hardships which have developed because of inadequate funding. A Recent Legislative Task Force has heard of these issues. As I read the plans, no where does it

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state that medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation is covered as an essential insured benefit. Movement of 911 victims and inter facility patients is essential to patient care and operational aspects of our hospitals. As an individual who has helped EMS grow to what is today, please remember to cover this aspect of healthcare in insurance programs so EMS will be able to continue the medically necessary patient care in the out of hospital arena.

Joshua M. Collins, Legislative Director for Citizen Action/Illinois

On behalf of Citizen Action/Illinois, we would like to make the following suggestions and comments to Governor Quinn's Healthcare Implementation Council: - Above all else, we believe it is critical for the state to ensure that there is fair and equitable coverage for consumers both inside and outside the Exchange. We ask that the state and HHS work diligently to prevent adverse selection so that the Exchange does not become a high-risk pool for the sick and poor while the outside market retains a mostly younger and healthier market - We strongly support the protection of existing state health mandates and urge the Governor to remain steadfast in his commitment to choosing a "Benchmark plan" that currently covers all mandates not covered by the ACA. We have worked diligently to ensure that these additional protections be conferred to thousands of Illinoisans that depends on these protections and want to make sure that these are not endangered in the process. - Citizen Action/Illinois supports efforts that maximize public resources and develop skills for persons with serious mental illness, children with serious emotional disturbance and those with developmental disabilities. Citizen Action/Illinois also supports parity in the provision of services for people with mental health disabilities. Historically, there has been institutionalized discrimination against segments of society that are affected by mental and substance abuse issues, and we ask that the state and HHS make a good-faith effort to include these services and clarify requirements for insurers. All of the potential benchmark plans have room for improvement in the services covered in terms of mental health and substance abuse.

Christine A. Tregoning

"Medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation" needs to be included in the list.

Gary Bettenhausen

medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation

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Brian Witek

Advance Ambulance who operates in the City of Chicago, State of Illinois providing Ground emergency and non- emergency transportation would like to point out that the listed Insurance Companies under the Illinois Insurance Exchange does not provide for Medical Nesessary Air/Gound Transportation for Ambulance.

James Gutierrez

I have viewed the insurance list of providers and benefits the state will cover and note that “medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation” is not included in the coverage statements. This needs to be covered as an essential benefit by insurance companies who wish to part of the Illinois Insurance Exchange. Victims need 911 transportation and hospitals, nursing home facilities etc need patients moved for many reasons.

Jack M Whitney MD

I have viewed the insurance list of providers and benefits they will cover and noted that “medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation” is not included in the coverage statements. This needs to be covered as an essential benefit by insurance companies who wish to part of the Illinois Insurance Exchange.

Mike Hansen

It is a shame that medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation is not included in the coverage statements. Get with it Illinois legislators. Emergency medical services (EMS) is the safety net most Illinois residents use and this coverage needs to be properly recognized.

Gregory Scott

Medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation must be included as an essential benefit by insurance companies that desire to participate in the Illinois Insurance Exchange. There are many non-emergency instances where a patient must be transported in an air or ground ambulance due to medical necessity.

Kent A Adams

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Medically necessary air and/or ground ambulance transportation needs to be included as an essential benefit by insurance companies who wish to be a part of the Illinois Insurance Exchange. Victims need 911 transportation and hospitals, nursing home facilities etc need patients moved for many reasons.

Susan Hecht

I have acknowledge that I read the insurance list of providers and benefits they will cover and noted that “medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation” is not included in the coverage statements. This needs to be covered as an essential benefit by insurance companies who wish to part of the Illinois Insurance Exchange. Victims need 911 transportation and hospitals, nursing home facilities etc need patients moved for many reasons. Please do not leave this out!!!

Patrick O'Brien

Medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation

Kate Phillippi

Acupuncture is a non-invasive, effective method of healthcare that has helped many people. If added to the essential health benefits in Illinois, acupuncture will be able to help many more. Acupuncture is a preventative medicine, putting a focus on maintaining health and wellness. It is also proven effective for many chronic, debilitating diseases.

Scott C. French, MD, FACEP

These criteria include ground and air ambulance service under “emergency services”, but it would be more accurate and more appropriate to include in the criteria medically necessary air and ground ambulance transportation, rather than distinguish between emergency and non-emergency services. Each of the 10 plans sampled by the Council includes medically necessary transportation in both emergency and non-emergency situations. In addition, both Illinois’ Medicaid program and the federal Medicare program cover ambulance transportation when such transportation is medically necessary and other means of transportation are contraindicated.

Jean Galovich

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My comments are specific to the Essential Health Benefits and benchmark plan that will be decided upon by the State. I am the mother of a teenager with autism and mental illness. Our family has had insurance coverage via a small group plan through my husband's business. These plans typically limit outpatient visits for mental illness (because plans of that size are not subject to mental health parity laws) as well as PT/OT/Speech visits for autism. We have relied extensively on the State mandate requiring increased dollar coverage for therapy visits for an autism diagnosis. Please select a plan that preserves the state mandates and does not limit any of these outpatient benefits. Also, as it relates to prescription coverage, my child has probably, at one time or another, been on more medications than those he has not tried. It is very difficult to find the right medication, as it is a trial and error process, and a child's body changes so rapidly. The plight of one of our congressmen who has courageously sought treatment for his mental illness reminds me that to achieve stability and find the right regimen takes significant time and effort, but a child is expected to be in school the entire time this diagnosis and treatment is taking place. If only a single medication "per class" is approved, many children may not achieve stability and will need to be placed in alternative schools or closed classrooms which does not allow them to thrive, causes family hardship and comes at increased cost to school districts and taxpayers. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Nathan Hamman

As part of the preventative and wellness and chronic disease management coverage I feel that access to A registered dietitian should be covered. We this can be something affordable for diseases other than diabetes management we may be able to off set some of the costs associated with obesity and other diseases by getting people education from reliable sources instead of what they read on the internet. Registered dietitians are nutritoin experts and should be covered the same way a physical therapist or other professional is. I also stronly feel that for those who are morbidly obsese coverage needs t be provided for weight management and bariatric surgery. THE health care systme can save many dollars over the years by paying for this upfornt and saving medicatoin cost later

Cathy Macchietto

Health care reform to me means that hopefully I can relax my mind and not have to stress and worry about heath care issues for me personally. I have been denied coverage as I am self employed. I then married and was able to have coverage through my spouse's employer. I am now divorced and on cobra. My cobra expires at June 30, 2014 so without this reform or another husband, I will again be un-

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insurable due to pre-existing conditions as a self employed person. I am an accountant, with a master's degree in accountancy. A CPA, licensed in the State of Illinois. I have owned and operated my own Corporation since 2002. I am a board member of the local hospital. Not that any of this should make any difference but it seems a lot of people seem to think that only unemployed and indignant individuals are in this position. That is not true. And either way, we are all worthy of access to healthcare and peace of mind in respect to this. I highly support the health insurance reform as Obama has passed it. Let's give it a go and make necessary adjustments as we grow and learn through experience. Let's not waste billions more on scraping this plan and passing another. That only delays what is so desperately needed in Illinois and the US and costs more taxpayer dollars that we don't have.

Bradley M Radovich

I am a bariatric patient who has saved money on health care costs with the surgery. I believe evaluation of morbidly obese for the possibility of surgery should be included in baseline health care. Surgery for those meeting specified medical requirements should also be included. This option will save much money over time. The current generation will not outlive my generation due to obesity epidemic. For those who think it a character weakness, please educate yourselves, for we must together educate society. Thanks

Barbara Wick

The National Health Care Plan would benefit by including acupuncture in its agenda with reduced health care costs, no drug reactions in the patient, and improved overall health.

Thom Heil

Acupuncture is a relatively cheap, effective method of treating a whole host of physical ailments. It should be included as an essential health benefit so that people have easier access to this powerful healing tool.

Michael Korkowski

I like the President's health care reform, especially allowing children to age 26 to be on he parent's plan. Plus no pre-exhisting condition denials.

Jonathan Wallace

The Suburban Surgical Care Specialists appreciate the opportunity to comment to the Health Care Reform Implementation Council and encourages the selection of an essential health benefits package that provides coverage for services across the continuum of care for obesity. The Epidemic A majority of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese. The prevalence of obesity (BMI>30) in the U.S. exceeds 35% and 6.3% of adults have severe obesity (BMI ≥ 40),. Nearly 2.8 million people in Illinois are obese, an increase of 6.2 percent to 8.7 percent over a ten year period. Additionally, the number of adults with diabetes has doubled during the last ten years and currently affects 844,000 Illinoisans. Etiology of Obesity Obesity arises as a result of a complex interaction of genetic and environmental factors. The end result is a metabolic dysregulation of energy balance which results in a gradual increase of excess body fat. Obesity-Related Pathology Obesity has been determined to be a disease, associated with multiple comorbid conditions, including diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, obstructive sleep apnea, impaired quality of life and others. Obesity is also associated with premature mortality.

Improvement or induction of remission of these comorbid conditions as well as improved survival associated with weight loss further supports the concept of obesity as a disease. The Treatment of Obesity Obesity treatments, like metabolic and bariatric surgery and behavior modification programs, help resolve comorbidities, reduce costs, and transform the lives of patients. In fact, bariatric and metabolic surgery can resolve or improve diabetes (78.1% resolved, 86.6% improved or resolved) and other obesity – related comorbidities after metabolic and bariatric surgery. In addition, bariatric and metabolic surgery is highly cost effective producing longitudinal cost savings and overall health improvement. The downstream savings associated with metabolic surgery procedures is approximately 2 years, with a range of 16 to 34 months. Behavior Modification The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force (USPSTF) recommends that clinicians screen adult patients for obesity and offer intensive counseling and behavioral interventions to promote sustained weight loss for obese adults. Intense behavior modification can result in a modest but definite sustained weight loss of approximately 5% after four years of ongoing intervention. Thus, it is recommended that the essential health benefits package provides coverage for the following obesity preventive and treatment services recommended by the USPSTF: • Screening adults for obesity and offering intensive counseling and behavioral interventions for the obese. • Dietary counseling for adults with hyperlipidemia and other known risk factors for cardiovascular and diet-related chronic disease. • Screening for obesity in children and adolescents and offer them or refer them to comprehensive, intensive behavioral interventions to promote improvement in weight status. Metabolic & Bariatric Surgery Metabolic and Bariatric surgery

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has been recommended for adults with BMI>40 or >35 with associated comorbid condition following the NIH Consensus Conference of 1991, reaffirmed by the NIH guidelines for the treatment of obesity in 1998. In this patient population the weight loss accomplished by bariatric surgery far exceeds that achieved by behavior modification or other medical interventions. This weight loss is sustained over intervals as long as 20 years. The benefits of this weight loss include induction of remission of the life-threatening comorbidities associated with severe obesity, including a majority of patients with diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidemia and obstructive sleep apnea. , Quality of life is also improved. Improved survival over a period of years has also been demonstrated in multiple studies, including the matched cohort analyses from Sweden and Utah. , As the result of the induction of remission of comorbid conditions, as well as a decrease in the incidence of all cancers, health care costs are reduced. A complete return on investment for laparoscopic gastric bypass has been reported in as little as two years, utilizing commercial claims data from multiple U.S. databases. The potential for a substantial increase in short-term cost associated with the upfront cost of the surgical procedures is understood. Experience has shown, however, that a “rush to the operating room” occurs to only a very modest extent at most, following addition of a bariatric surgical benefit to a specific health plan. Further, patients denied access to the benefit had a greater incidence of new comorbidities within a median follow-up period of 36 months. Maintaining a bariatric benefit helps the state and the health plans in the Exchange avoid co-morbid costs associated with clinically severe obesity. Improving controls in the reimbursement policy can help improve patient selection and ultimately outcomes. Detailed evidence around how savings and quality improvements can be found in the attached Cost Effectiveness Summary. Strong clinical evidence shows bariatric surgery can lead to improvement or resolution of Type 2 diabetes (T2DM) and other comorbidities. Specifically, new randomized controlled trial evidence supports recent cohort studies and meta-analyses showing bariatric surgery can lead to improvement or resolution of Type 2 Diabetes (T2DM) and other cardiovascular co-morbidities – and reduce medication usage. Metabolic and bariatric surgery:, , • Helps Type 2 diabetic patients achieve glycemic control more effectively than intensive medical therapy within 1 year. , • Resolves or improves Type 2 diabetes and other obesity-related CV comorbidities for up to 5 years . , , • Reduces medication use for Type 2 diabetes and other CV comorbidities for up to 3 years. , , • Results in morbidity & mortality rates that are similar to well-established general surgery procedures such as gallbladder surgery and hysterectomy. • Reduces the risk of cardiovascular death (myocardial infarction or stroke) compared to customary intervention. In summary, obesity is a life-threatening disease which is associated with multiple chronic diseases and premature mortality. Modest weight loss with non-surgical therapy can be achieved with

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intense behavior modification. More substantial weight loss with greater benefits is achieved by bariatric surgery with a low complication rate. Cost savings are generated over time. It is therefore appropriate to include the medical and surgical treatment of obesity in any and all health plans offered in the state of Illinois from this point forward. By providing coverage for these evidence based services for those participating in the health exchange, Illinois can reduce both the short term and the long term burden of obesity in our state and save lives of Illinoisans.

Kirk T. Hartley

Broad health insurance coverage is needed, and Illinois' current minimums should be maintained, if not expanded. The premise of "Obamacare" is correct - everyone should be buying coverage so that risks are spread among all, instead of allowing cherry-picking by health insurers. Broad coverage - without exclusions for pre-existing conditions, is especially needed for person facing health issues such as cancer, ALS, Alzheimers and other life-altering diseases. The point of insurance is to spread risks among many, and that happens only with broad coverage. Yes, it's expensive, but taxpayers end up footing the bill in one or the other. It's better to let insurance costs rise and force employers to pay wages sufficient to cover real costs of living.

Edward Sachs, Jr.

The system should be consumer choice driven, market based , and need based. Wellness and disease treatment should be primary goals as opposed to public contraception and non-health related abortion benefits. I have little confidence in any of the work being done or in ACA, which I read and substantially understand. Illinois is broke, medicaid is broken, and interest groups are driving political decisions. I wish you luck, but expect very little if any improvement. Political decisions benefiting voter blocks and health institutions rather market based consumer decisions , best practices, and need based care should be your guiding principles.

Vafa Shayani

I would like to strongly encourage coverage for bariatric surgical procedures as an essential health benefit. Morbidly obese patients suffer from a challenging chronic disease for which they deserve the full spectrum of medical and surgical treatment options. Additionally, there are ample data to support the long-term financial benefits of surgical management of morbid obesity when compared to non-

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surgical options. These benefits are enjoyed not just by the patients, but also by the health systems and the community at large who ultimately share the financial burden of the totality of our health care expenses.

Karen A. Radovich

I cannot express strongly enough the importance of the Health Care Reform Council keeping bariatric surgery coverage as an Essential Health Benefit. Without the lap band surgery I received from Dr. Heydari, I don't know how I would have been able to survive the last two and a half years. As a diabetic I had many health issues, but it was my obesity that kept me from doing the most mundane of daily chores. With my very necessary surgery and then successful weight loss I was able to face each day as I took on the task of caring for an 85 year old family member. This included driving him to continuous medical appointments, housekeeping, shopping, and everything else that allowed him to remain independent in his own home. About a year ago it became apparent that I was also moving into the role of caretaker for my own husband. At 76 he has had various medical problems along with receiving the devastating news of losing his vision to dry macular degeneration. He is getting more and more dependent on me and I am so thankful that I am now physically able to take care of his needs. Please, please continue the CARE for OBESITY that has been a lifesaver for so many people. That care and the guidance I received at Centegra Weight Loss Center in Huntley has been a Godsend and something for which I will always be eternally grateful. I pray that others will continue to be able to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of it's wonderful staff of professionals.

Susie Dirkx RN Bariatric Coordinator

As a Registered Nurse, and coordinator of the Centegra Weight Loss Surgery Center, I feel passionately about the importance of including Bariatric Surgery in the covered benefits of the Affordable Care Act. I see the results every day of patients who were morbidly obese, having tried every diet, pill, program etc and unable to reach a healthy weight. Patients who have numerous medical problems, difficulty breathing, walking, and carrying on normal activities, being transformed into a newer healthier, happier person. A person that can work, live, and contribute to society. Please consider all of the medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, cancer, joint disease, sleep apnea, high cholesterol, heart disease, and many more caused by or made worse by the disease of obesity, and include Bariatric surgery in the covered benefits. As a Bariatric patient myself, I know how hard I tried to lose the weight

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and be healthy. Bariatric surgery helped me, not without a lot of effort on my part, to be the normal weight healthier person that I am today.

William Beckman

For a base plan, a narrow selection of services is needed to keep policy prices down and save consumers money. If virtually everything is covered in the base plan to make sure no patients will be without adequate coverage for some conditions, then the base plan becomes the only plan and such an approach will drive up the cost of health insurance for everyone. There is a need to include provision for conscience rights by offering a base plan that does not cover sterilization, abortion, abortion-inducing drugs, contraceptives, in vitro fertilization, and other items that raise moral issues for many people. Thus, there is a need for multiple base plans to provide options even at the base level.

Marla Curtis

I think that Bariatric Treatment should be included in the Health Plan. I have suffered from obesity since I was about 7 years old and when I found Dr. Heydari (Crystal Lake, IL) I was 385 pounds and afraid for my life. I had tried everything I could to lose weight and was not successful. I had Gastric Bypass in December 2008 and by June 2010 I was down to 150 pounds. I have kept the weight off and still see my doctor for check-ups, if not for the Bariatric Treatment that was made available to me while a Medic-Aid recipient, I would have died. Please include this treatment in the health plan.

Roger M. Rutz

The people of Illinois need to be able to access alternative and complementary medicine for health issues that are currently unable to be treated by Western Biomedicine and as alternatives to Western pharmaceuticals or to invasive surgery both of which have serious side effects.

Constance Bonbrest

I support acupuncture as a basic health benefit, because I believe it offers a benefit to health. In some cases acupuncture is better than medical treatment because there are no side effects, as there are with medications, surgery, or other medical treatments.

Siri Michel

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It is important to me to have acupuncture as an essential health benefit because it is one of the best modalities to prevent illness and keep people healthy. It is also excellent at treating many illnesses that biomedicine finds challenging. It can provide an excellent adjunct to many mainstream health interventions decreasing recovery time, controlling pain, or supporting health during, for example, a round of chemo. Ear acupuncture is also an excellent low-cost treatment to help those who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder and for those recovering from substance abuse. I would be very proud of Illinois if my state were to take this amazing step forward by including acupuncture as an essential health benefit.

Jeanne M. Parker

Acupuncture should be recognized as an Essential Health Care Benefit, available to all who have found it beneficial to their well-being.

Kari Adams

Please include bariatric surgery as a benefit under the new health insurance law. Three years ago, I was 291lbs., trending toward hypertension and diabetes, an orthopedist recommended that I consider replacing my left knee due to an old injury, and went to the doctor three times that year because of back problems. I decided that I had to do something drastic to become healthy. All of my attempts to diet over the prior 20 years were successful in that I would lose weight, but then I would gain the weight back, plus 15 or more pounds. Since bariatric surgery in 2009, I have lost 160lbs, my left knee no longer has to be replaced, and my back no longer hurts. Bariatric surgery is not for everyone, but it was a wonderful tool to help me become healthy. To break down the costs in numbers: Average annual cost to treat hypertension, per person, based on 2007 data: \$1,375 Average annual cost to treat diabetes, per person, based on 2002 data: \$15,893 Average cost of knee replacement, based on 2012 data: \$40,000 The total cost of my healthcare, without bariatric surgery, for the next 30 years (inflation not included): Hypertension: $\$1,375 \times 30 = \$41,250$ Diabetes: $\$15,983 \times 30 = \$476,490$ Knee Replacement: \$40,000 The 30-year total cost of my healthcare, without bariatric surgery: \$588,040 The cost of bariatric surgery: \$35,000 Based on my situation, the government can save \$550,000 PER OBESE PERSON over a 30-year period, by offering bariatric surgery. These costs don't include other financial considerations, including lost wages (directly affecting taxes), reducing obesity related disability claims, reducing the need for obesity related social services, and the list goes on. If making sure that healthcare is affordable and available to everyone, the decisions for what services will be covered have to be considered holistically.

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Granted, the one-year cost to treat diabetes is significantly less than bariatric surgery, however, every year thereafter, the cost climbs and climbs and climbs. Please ensure that bariatric surgery is a covered service under the new healthcare laws. By the way, my weight is now steady at about 135lbs and I feel great. I know that I will not be a burden on the healthcare system because of obesity, and that is a wonderful feeling.

Sarah Buytendorp

As a Registered Dietitian actively working in the weight management field, everyday I witness the positive health results of bariatric surgery in the treatment of the chronic disease of obesity. Patients experience improvements in blood pressure, blood sugar, cholesterol and overall have an improvement in physical activity. To that end the importance of screening for obesity as well as treatment is an important aspect in healthcare. These both should be included in the essential health benefits for the people of the State of Illinois.

Christopher Joyce MD

ASMBS ILLINOIS STATE CHAPTER PUBLIC COMMENTS RE: Public Comments on Essential Benefits

Benchmark In the coming weeks, the State of Illinois will move forward in selecting a benchmark health plan to define the scope of its essential health benefits package for its health exchange plan. At this critical juncture, the Illinois state Chapter of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery (ASMBS), the Illinois Association of Bariatric Surgeons(IABS), and their many members providing obesity treatment services across the state, implore you to recognize our country's rising obesity epidemic and the importance of ensuring patient access to medically necessary treatment services for the medical and surgical management of obesity. Specifically, we are recommending that the State adopt one of the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois plans for small group coverage(BCBS BlueAdvantage or BCBS BlueEdge) as the model for the essential benefit program as it covers services to treat obesity including bariatric and metabolic surgery. In 2011, we reviewed the medical evidence of bariatric surgery with the Medical Directors of Blue Cross Blue Shield of Illinois. Those meetings lead to better access to care for their insured and have helped thousands of Illinois citizens with their obesity and their obesity related medical conditions. In addition, we are recommending that the State carefully review services required by the Affordable Care Act (such as intensive obesity counseling as it has a B rating from the USPTF) to make sure they have been added, as required. Finally, we recommend that a process for adding "new" essential benefits be developed quickly as new, safe and effective obesity treatments, such as obesity

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drugs, either have been or will be approved and will soon be available to citizens of Illinois. Obesity's impact on both individual health as well as healthcare costs is well documented. Many large employers, federal programs, such as Medicare, Tricare and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Plan as well as State plans, such as state employee and Medicaid, provide coverage for various obesity treatment services as they recognize both the health improvement as well as cost-savings benefit of such coverage. Unfortunately, this philosophy has not always translated down to the small employer and individual markets regarding the fundamental obesity treatment tools – intensive behavioral counseling, pharmacotherapy and bariatric surgery. **Bariatric and Metabolic Surgery Coverage** We would like to note that Medicare, Tricare, 47 State Medicaid plans, and 44 State employee plans cover bariatric and metabolic surgery. In addition, Mercer's 2010 National Survey of Employer-Sponsored Health Plans show that bariatric surgery is covered by 40% of plans with

Victoria Brett

Do not omit obesity treatment from our benefits. The lap-band procedure has changed my life. Because of the weight I lost I have dramatically reduced my risk for diabetes and other diseases. I am able to function more like a normal being without always wondering how my weight influences the decision of others as well as what I can and cannot do. Obesity has a great bearing on the mental condition of people and taking the hope away from them could be devastating.

Heather Sullivan

"There is significant evidence of acupuncture's value to expand its use into conventional medicine" -NIH, 1997 convention on acupuncture. When both the WHO and NIH agree that acupuncture provides value to both health prevention and symptom reduction, then why wouldn't Illinois reform it's health care to provide basic acupuncture coverage? It's the right thing to do.

Mark Gordon

Whatever plan is developed, it should offer the absolute minimum coverage allowable under federal law. The idea is to have "affordable" coverage and coverage simply won't be affordable if it includes every conceivable ailment. This should be the base plan. Companies can always offer added coverage for those who want to purchase more, but start with the stripped-down model and go up from there. Not everyone can afford a Lexus. We need the "Model T" version to hold down costs.

Reva Richards

We want to ensure that the continuum of care for obesity is addressed in the Essential Health Benefits (EHBs) for the state of IL. This includes bariatric surgery, obesity screening, etc. The Health Care Reform Council (HRC) will be analyzing the various benefit options in order to make an informed recommendation that balances cost and benefits in the best interest of Illinoisans

Joann Cozzi

I sincerely hope that Bariatric Surgery is a part of the new program. This surgery is imperative for good health, and well being. It saved my life. Since my surgery I have lost 85 lbs and am now on one small dosage for hypertension. Prior to surgery I had sleep apnea, high blood pressure, back and knee pain and numerous other problems. Thank God for this surgery. Please keep this in the new medical health plan. Thank you.

Dr. Sean J. Finley

Patients deserve the right to be able to choose the provider and kind of medicine that benefits them most without having to pay completely out of pocket due to lack of coverage. In today's world, where millions of Americans seek what is termed "alternative" medical care every year, it just makes sense for it to be a part of our healthcare policy. The benefits are clear for patients, and they're clear for the nation's checkbook as well as acupuncture care has been shown to reduce healthcare costs overall, especially when used as part and parcel of a preventative care region. Why wait until one is thirsty to dig a well?

Daun DePaul

I really believe that all bariatric surgeries should be included in all health care insurance and the health care plan the Obama plan should also cover this surgery. It has really changed my life and my health. I have insurance, but could have never had this surgery if I did not have a health care plan. So please help those who would also greatly need and want /need this helpful surgery. The benefits are wonderful. I

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know of a few people who would have this surgery if they could get it. I would have it again in a heart beat. THANK YOU

Laura Cellini

I would like to respectfully ask that all provisions specified in Illinois Public Act (215 ILCS 5/356z.14), Sec. 356z.14. Autism spectrum disorders, be required in the Illinois Essential Health Benefits Benchmark Plan. Many of these services address benefit categories; (5), (7), and (10). Also, please consider requiring Gamma-globulin medication, for Primary Immune Deficiencies, this would meet category benefit requirements (6) and (9). Thank you.

Mary Gail Patterson

Please consider making Bariatric surgery part of the EHB. I was fortunate enough to be able to have this surgery in 2009, and my life changed drastically. I was able to get off medicines for blood pressure, Cholesterol lowering and GERD, plus I am able to exercise normally for the first time in many years.

Cristina Torres

80% of the population illness can be treated by a primary health professional, many of them can be treated by Acupuncture and prevent them from becoming more complex diseases. Please, consider acupuncture as an essential health care benefit in Illinois. Thank you so much.

Patricia Worth

Acupuncture should be an essential health benefit because it is both effective and inexpensive and noninvasive. It also treats the whole person rather than treating the individual parts of a person (mechanically). And it is capable of treating many conditions which western medicine considers incurable. Give people a choice in their own health care.

Kristen Streit

I believe acupuncture should be covered by healthcare because it is an effective, low-cost alternative to modern medicine. I have used it for years for stomach, allergy, and other issues. I had originally been going to a regular doctor for that care, but found that at 30, I didn't want to be put on so many pills...especially since they weren't helping much and giving me several unpleasant side effects.

Essential Health Benefits Comments

*Comments appear exactly as submitted

Acupuncture proved to be not only effective, but usually caused positive bonuses in other areas...and no negative side effects.

Claretha Sainen

Acupuncture is a preventive option for many disorders that cost us thousands of dollars to treat through western medications. Health concerns like hypertension, menstrual disorders, pain are just a few diseases that can be well managed in the hands of a licensed acupuncture practitioner.

I tried many time with many methods to quit smoking and could not until I tried acupuncture. It made it very doable and I will be forever grateful. Acupuncture has saved me thousands of dollars and possibly my life.

Acupuncture covered by insurance!

Edwin Alvarez

Acupuncture has been a great use to NE in dealing with depression, as well, A chronic shoulder injury. It has eased.my pain, and given Me more mobility. It is.simple fast and effective.

Esther Weiss

Acupuncture should be included in the benchmark policy because there are people for whom that is their only antidote for pain - there are those people for whom acupuncture allows them to move. Acupuncture is an old, established, way of treating many health issues.
